

Bat Rabies in South Dakota

Unlike most animal bites, bat bites can be very difficult to detect. Punctures can be less than 1 mm in diameter and scratches less than 1 cm in length. Since bat bites are surface wounds, you may not feel pain and may not realize that an exposure even took place.

Due to the uncertainty of bat exposure, the CDC gives guidelines for the postexposure prophylaxis treatment of rabies: (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Human Rabies Prevention- United States, 1999: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. MMWR 1999; 48 [No. RR-1].)

- **If a person has direct contact with a bat, the bat should be captured and sent to a lab*. If the bat cannot be captured, treatment should be given to the patient.**
- **Exposure should be considered if a person is in the same room as a bat and may be unaware of direct contact. Such instances include a sleeping person waking up with a bat in the room, or a bat in the same room as a young child, a mentally disabled person, or an intoxicated person.**
- **In the case of possible exposure, the bat should be captured if at all possible and sent to a lab. If not, the physician should consider administering postexposure prophylaxis.**

· Postexposure prophylaxis includes 1 dose of rabies immune globulin and 5 doses of human diploid cell rabies vaccine administered in the arm on days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28 as soon after exposure as possible.

· The rabies virus is fatal without prompt treatment. It is imperative that the rabies postexposure prophylaxis be given prior to onset of symptoms.

◆ There were 4 cases of human rabies caused by bats in the USA in 2000.

◆ From 1990-2001, 50 out of the 1278 bats (4%) tested for rabies in South Dakota were positive for the virus. Other rabid animals during those years include skunks (997), cattle (181), dogs (79), cats (70), horses (38), fox (7), sheep (6), pigs (3), badgers (3), raccoon (2), bison (2), opossum (1) and shrew (1).

◆ Persons cannot get the rabies virus through contact with bat feces, urine, or blood. They also will not get the virus from touching the bat's fur, although a bat should never be handled with bare hands.

*The SD Public Health Lab in Pierre (call 773-3368) and the Animal Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratory in Brookings (688-5171) are the only labs in SD approved for testing for the rabies virus. For rabies consultations or additional information, call the South Dakota Department of Health at **1-800-592-1861**